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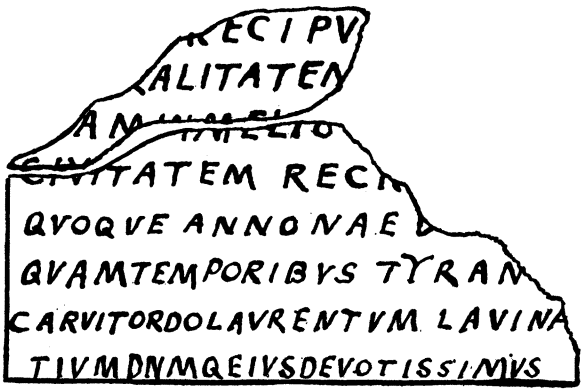
THE LATEST DATED INSCRIPTION FROM LAVINIUM[1]

By Walter Dennison

During a visit to Pratica di Mare, the site of the ancient Lavinium, the writer came across the following unpublished inscription in the garden of the Palazzo Borghese. The keeper of the palazzo said that the base, on which the inscription is cut, was discovered in the immediate vicinity some four or five years ago. The base is badly damaged, the upper half of it being almost squarely broken off. A large portion has also disappeared from the right side of the front face which bears the inscription; one fragment containing ll. 1–3 has been saved. The base, as it now stands, is about 0.96 m. high, 0.46 m. wide, and about the same in thickness. The letters, which vary in height from 3 cm. (last line) to 4 cm. (l. 4), are shallow and not easily made out. Without other evidence than the forms of the letters the inscription would be assigned to the fourth century A. D. Eight lines of writing, complete or fragmentary, are still preserved. The text is as follows:



I offer the following restoration:

[ob p]r(a)ecipu[am . . . . . | libe]ralitatem [ac reform|at]am in melio[rem statum] | civitatem, recr[eata] | quoque annonae c[ura], | quam temporibus tyran[ni] | caruit, ordo Laurentum Lavina|tium. D(omino) n(ostro) m(aiestati)q(ue) eius devotissimus.

[1] This inscription is to be No. 592 in the forthcoming supplement to *CIL* XIV in *Eph. Epig.* IX.

The number of letters which should be restored in ll. 2–5 is determined partly by the spacing. In the last three lines of the inscription, which are practically complete, there are respectively 21, 25, and 24 letters. The E of *annonae*, the thirteenth letter in its line, stands over the second V in *Laurentum*, the eighteenth letter of l. 7; with equal spacing, therefore, only four or five letters more can be placed at the end of l. 5. Again, the second R of *recr-* of l. 4 is nearly over E of *annonae* of the following line, which would necessitate restoring four or five letters to complete this line. Furthermore, the eleventh letter, O, in *melio-* (l. 3) is above the fourteenth letter, R of *Laurentum*, in l. 7; accordingly I have supplied nine letters in the line. Finally, since the second E in *[libe]ralitatem* stands over O of the following line, we may suppose that at least nine or ten letters were lost here.

The last line indicates that the inscription was set up in honor of an emperor. A clue as to what emperor it was is afforded by the last word in l. 6, *tyran - - - .* The short space at the end of the line forbids the restoration of this word in the plural. There could be no reference, therefore, to the *tyranni*, Magnus Maximus and his son Flavius Victor under Valentinian II, Theodosius and Arcadius in 388. Moreover, if the dedication belonged to the time of these three emperors, we should expect *eorum* in the last line of the inscription instead of *eius*, unless we suppose that an honorary statue was raised to each of the three,[1] which in so small a town as Lavinium is hardly likely. The word at the end of l. 6 must then be restored *tyran[ni]*. Mention is made of a *tyrannus* in the inscriptions of two emperors only, namely, in those of Constantine and in those of his son, Constantius. The "usurpers" were respectively Maxentius, who was defeated by Constantine[2] at Saxa Rubra and then at the Ponte Milvio in 312 A. D., and Magnentius, whose power was broken by Constantius[3] at Mursa in 353 A. D. Since no other *tyrannus* is mentioned in inscriptions or occupies a prominent place in literature,[4]

[1] As in *CIL* VI, 3791*a* = 31413 (Valentinian), 3791*b* = 31414 (Arcadius), *Bull. Com.* 1899, 222 and *Beiträge zur alten Geschichte* II, 246 (Theodosius).

[2] Cf. *CIL* VI, 1139.

[3] Cf. *CIL* VI, 1158, 1163.

[4] Eugenius, who was defeated and killed by Theodosius in 394, is called *tyrannus* by Orosius, vii. 35. 11, and Rufinus, ii. 33, but he is not so termed in any extant inscription.

we are justified in assuming that our inscription was erected in honor of either Constantine or Constantius.

But there is slightly preponderant evidence that we are here dealing with a document of the time of Constantine. From ll. 5–7, if correctly restored, we learn that the emperor had re-established the grain supply which had been lacking during the reign of the "usurper." Now, Maxentius had remained at or near Rome practically all the six years between 306, when he was declared emperor, and 312, the year of his defeat, and from no less than three literary sources we have testimony that under this cruel and licentious ruler there was great scarcity of food and the people suffered "as no one remembered they had suffered before." In the Chronograph of the year 354 we read in the section which gives a brief account of events that occurred under each emperor:[1]

Maxentius imp. ann. VI. Hoc imp. templum Romae arsit et fabricatum est. Thermas in Palatio fecit et circum in catecumbas. Fames magna fuit, etc.

Again, Eusebius, *De vita Constantini*, I, 36:

Οὕτω μὲν οὖν ἐπὶ Ῥώμης ὁ τυραννῶν, οὐκ ἔστιν εἰπεῖν, οἷα δρῶν τοὺς ὑπηκόους κατεδουλοῦτο· ὥστ' ἤδη τῶν ἀναγκαίων τροφῶν ἐν ἐσχάτῃ σπάνει καὶ ἀπορίᾳ καταστῆναι, ὅσην ἐπὶ Ῥώμης οὐδ' ἀλλοτέ ποτε οἱ καθ' ἡμᾶς γενέσθαι μνημονεύουσιν.[2]

Finally in the *Incerti Panegiricus Constantini* (ed. Baehrens), IX, 4, we find:

Ut haec, inquam, omittam, te, Constantine, paterna pietas sequebatur, illum, ut falso generi non invideamus, impietas; . . . . illum spoliatorum templorum, trucidati senatus, plebis Romanae fame necatae piacula. . . . .

Other historians, as Zosimus and Aurelius Victor, ascribe to Maxentius similarly a selfish and rapacious character.[3] It is clear, then, that a famine prevailed about Rome during the rule of this emperor; the army and imperial favorites, upon whom Maxentius relied for support, were undoubtedly supplied with every luxury,

[1] Edited by Mommsen in *Abhand. d. Phil.-Hist. Classe d. königl. säch. Gesellschaft d. Wissenschaften* I (1850), 248, and in *Monumenta Germaniae Hist.* IX, 1, 148.

[2] Similarly Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* VIII, 14, 6.

[3] Cf. also Landolfus Sagax *Addit. ad Pauli Historiam Rom.* XI, 172, 10: "Omni studio arandi serendique cessante tanta fames urbem atque omnia loca invaserunt ut nihil reliqui ad vitae subsidium fieret" (ed. Droysen [1879], 326, and *Monumenta Germaniae Hist.* II, 324).

but the country at large suffered.[1] This condition of affairs was changed by Constantine, who dealt with the followers of Maxentius with a firm hand, abolished the praetorian guards, and restored peace and order.

To consider what claims Magnentius has of being the *tyrannus* of the inscription we have only to recall that he was proclaimed emperor in the early part of 350 A. D. at Autun, and after the battle at Mursa he took his own life in 353, after a brief and wavering reign of a little more than three years. If he ever was at Rome at all, it was for a short time only,[2] although his power was felt there in more than one instance; but there is at least no literary evidence of a famine during this time. Constantius, furthermore, did not visit Rome immediately after his defeat of Magnentius. It was not until 356 that this happened (Ammianus Marcellinus xvi. 10); but, although he abrogated all the acts of Magnentius,[3] historical evidence is lacking that he took measures to relieve a food famine.[4] On the whole, therefore, I am inclined to refer the new inscription to Constantine, and, since that emperor remained in Rome but a few months following the defeat and death of Maxentius, to suppose that the inscription was set up soon after that event. The expression [*reformat*]*am in melio*[*rem statum*] *civitatem*, which I have restored in l. 4, seems further to favor this conclusion.[5] Again, the word, [*libe*]*ralitatem*,[6] which I feel certain is correctly restored in l. 2, is

[1] It is altogether probable that the re-establishment of the grain supply, referred to in l. 6 of the inscription, was not merely local, that is, limited to Lavinium, but was general throughout the region about Rome.

[2] The language of Socrates (ii. 32) implies that Magnentius was at Rome in the year 352 for a brief period of time. Earlier than this, in 350, when the ephemeral emperor, Nepotianus, was crushed, the blow was struck *a Magnentianis ducibus* (Oros. *Adv. Pag.* vii. 29. 11), or as Socrates puts it (ii. 25), Νεπωτιανὸν μὲν οὖν οἱ Μαγνεντίου καθεῖλον στρατηγοί; and Sozomenes (iv. 1), ὑπὸ τῶν Μαγνεντίου στρατιωτῶν ἀνῃρέθη. This manner of expression suggests that Magnentius was not at Rome at the time.

[3] *Cod. Theod.* ix. 38. 2; xv. 14. 5; xvi. 10. 5.

[4] The uprising under Orfitus, *praefectus urbis*, in 353 (Ammianus Marcellinus xiv. 6) occurred on account of *inopia vini*, but this was because of a desire for excess, not because of a real need of food.

[5] And yet Constantius also was hailed *restitutor urbis Romae atque orbis* (*CIL* VI, 1158).

[6] *Liberalitas* is used in another inscription (*CIL* XI, 5265) of Constantine.

more applicable to Constantine in the light of what we know of his life and works than to his son, whose cruel, haughty character is portrayed by Ammianus Marcellinus (xxi. 16).[1]

Finally, Constantine seems to have been more active than Constantius in the regulation and administration of the grain supply in Rome and its distribution in Italy;[2] thus his disposition to relieve suffering by hunger appears from *Cod. Theod.* xi. 27, of the year 322: "Provinciales egestate victus atque alimoniae inopia laborantes liberos suos vendere vel oppignorare cognovimus. . . . . Abhorret enim nostris moribus ut quemquam fame confici vel ad indignum facinus prorumpere concidamus."

Numerous examples are known of assistance rendered in times of famine by private citizens,[3] but there are only four other instances on record in which an emperor gave largesses of grain to communities in times of need.[4]

Professor Dessau, who would restore in ll. 4, 5, *recip[erata] quoque annonae c[opia]*, calls attention in a private letter to the fact that in the fourth century A. D. *annonae* (pl.), *salarium*, and *stipendium* are sometimes used nearly synonymously,[5] and suggests that in our inscription *annona* may mean monetary revenue (to be classed among the *iura* and *privilegia* of the Laurentes, *CIL* XIV, 2065), of which they were deprived by the "usurper" and which was restored by the new emperor. The expression *ordo Laurentum Lavinatium*, Professor Dessau further thinks, may be equivalent to *sacerdotes*

[1] On the other hand, meaningless expressions of flattery are common in imperial inscriptions of this period (cf. *CIL* III, 4180). In an inscription recently found near the Roman Forum (*Beiträge zur alten Geschichte* II, 243) Maxentius is called *providentissimus*.

[2] *Cod. Theod.* xi. 1. 2; xiii. 5. 1–8; 6. 1; xiv. 3. 1; 25. 1. See Krakauer *Das Verpflegungswesen d. Stadt Rom.*

[3] Cited in *Diz. Epig.* I, 474, and Olcott *Thes. Ling. Lat. Epig., s. v. Annona.*

[4] Trajan (Dio Cassius 69. 5. 2–3), Hadrian (*ibid.* 69. 16. 2), M. Aurelius (*Cap. Ant. Phil.* 11), M. Aurelius and L. Verus *maximi principes* (*CIL* V, 1874). See Hirschfeld *Philologus* (1870), p. 83, n. 131, and Ruggiero *Diz. Epig.* I, p. 486. In *CIL* III, 4180 it is recorded that the emperor Constans Victor (died 350) established permanently the food supply of the Colonia Savaria.

[5] E. g., in a letter of Symmachus, i. 79, the pay of a professor of philosophy (*philosophi salarium* and later *salarii emolumenta*) is the subject of remark, and in reference to this it is said, *super eius annonis dicitur orta dubitatio.* Cf. also *Cod. Theod.* viii. 17. 17, and *Vita Alexandri Severi* 41. 3.

Laurentes Lavinates, assuming that Lavinium was at that time merely a sacred site with practically no population or municipal life.[1]

Aside from the historical value pointed out above, the new inscription is important for the reason that it is the latest dated epigraphic monument[2] from Lavinium and assures us of the official existence of the ancient site as late as the first half of the fourth century A. D.

[1] See further *CIL* XIV, pp. 186 ff.

[2] The latest literary documents (*Chronograph of the Year 354*, and Symmachus) are cited by Dessau *CIL* XIV, p. 188.